

# CONCEPTION, PERCEPTION, AND BETTER RECEPTION

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## Friday Night:

*G-d told Moshe, "Tell the Children of Israel that if a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, then she will be ritually unclean for seven days, as if she had menstruated and became impure. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin will be circumcised." (Vayikra 12:1-3)*

What's wrong with this picture? What seems to be wrong is that the Torah is combining together matters that seem better off on their own.

First, the Torah begins with the law of spiritual impurity that results from giving birth to a son, even comparing it to the laws of general menstruation. This fits in perfectly with the laws of impurity that will follow when the Torah shifts gears and begins a long section about the Metzora, the person who is physically afflicted with leprosy as a result of a spiritual "illness."

Yet, almost just "by the way," the Torah inserts the all-important, seminal, and highly-representative mitzvah of Bris Milah before continuing on with the law of impurity for a woman who gives birth to a girl. It's not like there are not many other BETTER places to discuss the law of Bris Milah than at this point in the Torah.

Therefore, we must assume, this somewhat radical insertion here obviously comes to allude to a deeper meaning to this parshah than we might otherwise have overlooked. The question is, what is that deeper meaning? Or better yet, the question is, what does the Arizal say about this?

In Sefer HaLikutim, the Arizal explains that it is Bris Milah that reduces the power of spiritual impurity over us, and, reduces the chances of our becoming involved with it. The orlah, or, foreskin, represents the spiritual encasement that acts as a barrier between us and holiness, and, the removal of it through the mitzvah of Bris Milah opens the door of opportunity to become more spiritually inclined.

Elsewhere, in the classic Kabbalistic work, the "Aitz Chaim," the Arizal reveals even deep secrets of Milah. The letters of "Milah" (mem-yud-lamed-heh) can be re-arranged to spell "mem-lamed, yud-heh," which alludes to the spiritual incision made in the Sefiros on the level that is referred to by the letters "yud-heh," paving the way for a high-level revelation of light.

However, it is "Priyah," the ritual peeling back and removal of the foreskin during the actual Bris Milah, that "frees" the lights and allows them to come down and spiritually chase away spiritual impurity and the Negative Forces in creation from the child.

In fact, explains the Arizal, there are seventy such lights that are waiting to be released through each Bris Milah, alluded to by the "mem-lamed," which has the numerical value of seventy. Seventy, of course, is the number of wisdom and redemption (see "Redemption to Redemption, Part One: Purim," for more detail).

"Priyah," like "Milah," can also be arranged to spell "peh-raish-ayin, yud-heh," to refer to the "peeling back" of the barrier that allows the seventy lights to emanate downward. And, in case you didn't recognize it in the English, "peh-raish-ayin" is the root of the word "Paroah," the leader of Mitzrayim, or, Egypt.

And, as we have discussed on a number of occasions, the Hebrew word for Egypt is made up of two words: "metzer" (mem-tzaddi-raish) and "yumm" (yud-mem), with the latter set of letters totaling fifty, to allude to the "Fifty Gates of Understanding," the same level of light that Milah reveals. "Metzer," on the other hand, means "constriction," because, the philosophy of Egypt confined the Fifty Gates of Understanding.

Paroah exemplified this spiritually confining outlook, and "Priyah" came to free the Jewish people from it. And thus, the allusion to Bris Milah here, in this week's parshah, when discussing the power base of Paroah: spiritual impurity.

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## Shabbos Day:

*G-d told Moshe and Aharon, "When a person has a blotch, a discoloration, or spot on his skin like the curse of leprosy, then he should be brought to Aharon the priest, or to one of his descendants." (Vayikra 13:1-2)*

And, the Arizal explains, the connection to Bris Milah does not end there. Milah, says the Arizal, saves one from encounters with spiritual impurities and Tzora'as. For, Bris Milah promotes humility as well, since it leaves a "sign" of "ownership" to G-d, or commitment to the Master of the Universe.

According to the Arizal, there are three forms of pride that lead to a person's undoing, and, to different kinds of tzora'as. The first level of pride is one that a person hides to himself, so that on the surface he appears to be humble to all those who know him.

However, every negative pride will surface somewhere at some point in time, in some way, and, says the Arizal, lead to "se'eis," the first kind of tzora'as mentioned. This type of tzora'as is "stuck" within the skin, and, is not noticeable to all, just to the person who has become inflicted.

The second level of pride is one that leads a person to lord himself over those like him, but not over those who are wiser, more powerful, or more influential than he is. He will, eventually, do that which will cause him to become inflicted with "sepachas," which is a word that indicates "joining," as in, "... Join me (sepachani) into one of the priestly divisions ..." (I Shmuel 2:35).

The third form of pride is what leads to the kind of chutzpah which allows a person to act brazen before anyone and everyone, regardless of how much greater the person may be than he is. He is inflicted with "beheres," which is called "Beheres Azah" -- the "Brazen Spot."

Thus, even the slightest pride does not go unnoticed by G-d, for, as Dovid HaMelech wrote:

G-d will have reigned, He will have worn grandeur ... (Tehillim 93:1)

-- which means that G-d hates all forms of pride, for it is grandeur that is befitting only His kingdom, for, only G-d can possess it and yet remain humble as well, as it says:

Rebi Yochanan said: Wherever you find the greatness of The Holy One, Blessed is He, there you will find His humility ... (Megillah 31a)

We remind ourselves of this each day right before the Shemonah Esrai, when we recite:

"For this, the beloved praised and exalted G-d ... Who humbles the haughty and lifts the lowly."

(The people on that fateful Titanic voyage would have done well to learn this lesson. Had they understood how G-d feels about haughtiness and too much self-belief, they probably would never have made comments about the unsinkableness of the Titanic, or, held a banner over its bow that said, "A ship that even G-d can't sink."

Wooooooe, them's fightin' words.)

Back to the Bris Milah connection. Bris Milah also possesses the potential to help a person to become humbled. I say "potential" because we see that from the beginning of the Jewish people until today, chutzpah is still very much a possibility amongst the circumcised. After all, we ARE called a "stiff-necked people"!

Nevertheless, that is the inherent power within Bris Milah, and thus, when people attempt to ban Bris Milah --

Anti-Circumcision Association Scores a Victory January 6, 2001

A small laconic announcement reached the press several weeks ago that the Supreme Court from now on will allow urologists to perform bris milah in hospitals. Most people who read the announcement probably passed right over it without comprehending its significance. However, this announcement signals a chilling turning point in the fight of anti-bris milah groups against the universal acceptance of halachic-mandated bris milah among the Jewish people in Israel, which should alarm every one of us. It is most likely the harbinger of worse things to come.

At the age of 58, one Shimon Elmakor tried to sue his father for circumcising him as a child. While the Supreme Court threw his case out, two years later another suit was brought by the "Association Against Making Incisions in Infants" in which they sought to prohibit circumcision. The suit was based on the claim that injuring a helpless baby negates his lawful rights.

Although the Supreme Court also rejected this suit, the plans of the anti-circumcision caucus continued unabated. A new anti-circumcision association called "Mila Tova" was founded by a resident of Nes Tziona who explained that he was shaken to his roots when viewing the circumcision of his grandson. He proclaimed that the "old-fashioned" method of circumcision implemented by mohelim must be eliminated since they do not conform to modern medical standards. He specifically mentions that "pria" is unnecessary and should be eliminated, and the only circumcision which should be done is that which is carried out in hospitals all over the western world on the second or third day after the child's birth.

In other words, this founder of this association would agree to a secular form of circumcision totally unconnected to the religious nature and requirements of the ceremony as has been practiced by the Jewish people throughout generations. Mila Tova is demanding that hospital-sanctioned circumcision be permitted for establishment-approved doctors with experience in doing circumcisions. Mila Tova has a list of urologists who perform circumcision according to western standards. They apply a desensitizing ointment and after it takes affect, give a shot to anesthetize the area. After a few minutes, they do the circumcision...

-- especially as the Torah commands it to be performed, then, they not only break Torah law and the covenant of Avraham Avinu, but, they unleash terrible Negative Forces into the world and onto mankind, and help the world work itself towards self-destruction.

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## **SEUDAH SHLISHI:**

*If a woman discharges blood for many days when it is not her time for menstruation, then, for the duration of the flow she will be like a menstruant -- ritually un-clean. (Vayikra 15:25)*

Unlike most of the divrei Torah of Perceptions over the years, this one will be more halachic, because of the relevancy of the matter. For many, the following may already be known; for others, it may help to explain a seemingly complicated halachah.

According to the Torah, if a woman menstruates (even just a little), she remains spiritually impure for seven full days. That night, which begins a new Jewish day (after three medium stars have appeared in the sky) -- the eighth day -- after HALACHICALLY confirming that she is no longer menstruating, she is allowed to go to the mikvah to become ritually purified. she will remain so until the next menstruation.

However, according to the Torah, this is true only eleven days of the month during which she can expect to menstruate, based upon previous experience. If, however, she were to have a flow of blood outside this period of time, that is, during the remaining eighteen days of the month ...

"... it is not her time for menstruation..."

-- then, the law changes, and the halachos of a "Zavah" ("Flow"), to which the Torah referred to above, apply instead.

To become a "Complete Zavah," she has to have seen a flow of blood during this period of time, and, on three separate and on consecutive occasions. Then she must wait until the flow has ceased, and, after HALACHICALLY confirming that it has, she must then count seven "clean" days before going to the mikvah on the eighth night to become purified once again.

Thus, the basic difference between "Niddah" and "Zavah," at least in terms of duration, is that, a normal "Niddah" will last at least seven days, whereas a "Zavah" will last at least ten days.

In Temple times, this could make a big difference, because, neither woman could enter the Temple until ritually purified from their impure state (or a man from his). However, a difference of three, four, five, or whatever days could make all the difference in the world when the Temple still stood, and thus, a woman had to be VERY careful to keep track of which period of time she was going through to know how to count the days.

However, today we have no Temple -- may it return speedily in our days -- and not one woman today can tell you which part of the month she is presently in -- Niddah or (potential) Zavah. Without a Temple, it became somewhat irrelevant to keep track.

But not completely irrelevant, for, there is still the issue of physical intimacy of husband and wife, and in many instances, some women will not go into holy places while in such a state of spiritual impurity, etc. For this reason, a kind of halachic stringency was enacted where, all flows of blood are treated like that of the Zavah.

Thus, today, when a (married) woman menstruates, she only begins counting "clean days" after she has HALACHICALLY confirmed that the flow has completely ceased. When that is the case, then, she counts seven "clean days," after which time -- on the eighth night -- she can immerse in a halachic mikvah, and become purified once again, some TWELVE to FOURTEEN (on average) days later after first menstruating.

To say this has been a brief explanation of a very detailed and central law of Judaism is a gross understatement, and, a competent Halachic authority must be consulted for further clarification.

However, we are now well into the period of year referred to as, "Sefiros HaOmer," a period of time during which we also count days, like the Niddah, Zav, and Zavah.

It is not a coincidence. For all three states, Niddah, Zav, and Zavah are the result of the eating from

the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. In fact, after their interaction with the snake, Adam and Chava had the status of being a "Zav" and "Zavah," and, procreating in that state, says the Arizal, was what gave rise to Kayin and the first murderer in the history of mankind!

Thus, though individuals in such a state of spiritual impurity count only for themselves, the nation as a whole, during this time, count for all of us and mankind in general. All year round, and especially without a Temple in our midst to remind us, we live with the illusion of being spiritually pure, when, in fact, we are far from it.

Counting "Sefirah" at this time reminds once again of the true state of mankind, with the hope that such recognition will arouse a longing for greater states of spiritual purity, and, a return to the perfection of mankind in the Garden of Eden. Then we can be truly prepared to receive the Torah on Shavuot.

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### **MELAVE MALKAH:**

*A psalm of Asaf: O G-d! The nations have entered into Your inheritance, they have defiled the Sanctuary of Your holiness, they have turned Jerusalem into heaps of rubble. (Tehillim 79:1)*

Imagine being chased from your house by the enemy, G-d forbid. Running for your life, you take refuge in a nearby hiding place, from which you can see clearly how the enemy is destroying your home with delight. The house that had meant so much to you, in which, not too long ago, you felt secure and comfortable. The house you had poured so much of your life into, only to watch it be wantonly and senselessly destroyed.

How would you feel? How COULD you feel?

Terribly sad, and utterly helpless. For, as important as that house would be to you, still, your life would mean more, and, you'd be forced to sit back and let matters be. Even future revenge might be impossible.

How did G-d feel, so-to-speak, as He watched from His "hiding place" in Heaven as the enemy destroyed HIS House on earth, wantonly, and with a cruel delight ... as they ...

.. shed blood their blood like water around Jerusalem ... (3)

Terribly sad, to be sure, and, terribly helpless.

Sad? That's for sure, for even G-d mourns the loss of the Temple. But, "helpless"? G-d, Omnipotent G-d? How can that be?!

Ultimately, it cannot be, for, nothing is more powerful than G-d. However, for our sake, for the sake of history, and, for the sake of free-will -- the purpose in creating the world -- it not only CAN be, but

it IS. For, as the psalmist has said, "Give strength to G-d" (Tehillim 68:35).

For, as the Nefesh HaChaim teaches, G-d "mirrors" us. This concept is based upon the idea from the following posuk:

G-d is your Guardian; G-d is your Shadow at your right hand. (Tehillim 121:5)

And, explains the Nefesh HaChaim, just as a shadow mirrors the person, so, too, does G-d mirror our actions and attitudes. If we show Heaven a happy and positive face, then Heaven reflects that back to us. Likewise, if we are negative and depressed, then, this is what Heaven mirrors back to us.

This is why positive thinking and the belief in positive results can be enough to bring them about. G-d gives back to us what we give to Heaven -- measure-for-measure. And, whereas we lack the ability to bring about many of those impossible results, Heaven does not.

Therefore, if G-d is "forced" to watch nations enter His holy sanctuary and pillage His holy artifacts, then, it can only be because we ourselves allowed it to happen, either directly or indirectly.

Why should the nations say, "Where is their G-d?" Let Him be acknowledged among the nations before our eyes by avenging the blood of Your servants that has been spilled. (1)

The ultimate "Chillul Hashem" -- "Profanation of G-d's Name." Those who seem to have been faithful to G-d have been made to suffer, and even die, without any real revenge occurring on their behalf. The evil get the impression that one can get away with just about anything at the expense of others, and G-d is no longer there to stop them.

Read this:

PLO REPORT BLAMES BABY SHALHEVET'S MOTHER FOR DEATH Honest Reporting Communiqué  
Eg, 05 April 2001

"Voice of Palestine" radio continues to amaze students of the media with outlandish presentations of the news. According to a VOP report broadcast today, 10-month-old Shalhevet Pass was not killed by a Palestinian sniper but by her mother. IMRA today released the actual text of the report in question: "On the matter of the baby settler who was killed in Hebron a few days ago, we already said that her death was a fishy action and there is information according to which this baby was retarded and it was her mother who killed her in order to get rid of her."

There was a time in history when people were afraid to lie like this, especially about the Jewish people. But not anymore, just as the Talmud said would be the case just prior to Moshiach's arrival (Sanhedrin 97a). Only once Moshiach comes will truth prevail once again, and the world will FINALLY see that G-d has been there all the time, holding Himself back for the sake of free-will, to allow us to maintain integrity in a world that has lost it -- and be rewarded for doing so.

Let's hope he comes soon. Who knows how much worse it can get before it gets better, and how

much more we can handle.

However, the Talmud offers a glimmer of hope and provides a silver lining to the gray cloud, and, in the process, makes an interesting comparison to a person stricken with tzora'as. The Talmud says that, just as body when completely covered with tzora'as is in fact pure, so, too, will the generation that is "completely" guilty warrant Moshiach (Sanhedrin 98a).

Have a great Shabbos,  
Pinchas Winston

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